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NAMRU-3: Infectious Disease Physician Describes Rewarding Experience in Ghana

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By Lt. Cmdr. Nehkonti Adams



Lt. Cmdr. Adams and Ghana Detachment staff.

Did you know that in addition to human beings, birds and pigs can also become infected with influenza? Establishing surveillance for diseases such as influenza is one of many accomplishments of [U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3 \(NAMRU-3\) Ghana Detachment](#). I will share with you some of the amazing work we are involved in West Africa.

First, let me tell you a bit about myself. I'm originally from Liberia and immigrated to the U.S. with my family in 1986. I grew up in Minnesota and joined the Navy shortly after high school. I started out as a deck seaman and then became an aviation boatswain's mate and I am now an infectious disease physician, assigned to NAMRU-3 located in Cairo, Egypt, but based at the Ghana Detachment in Accra, Ghana.



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We have broadened our scientific portfolio to include surveillance of febrile, respiratory, and enteric syndromes; influenza; and patterns of antimicrobial resistance in sexually transmitted disease

In 1998, NAMRU-3 scientists began malaria research in Ghana in collaboration with the [Noguchi Memorial Institute of Medical Research \(NMIMR\)](#) in Accra. Since then we have broadened our scientific portfolio to include surveillance of febrile, respiratory, and enteric syndromes; influenza; and patterns of antimicrobial resistance in sexually transmitted disease; in addition to continuing work on malaria immunity and drug resistance, and field trials of diagnostics and vector control methods.

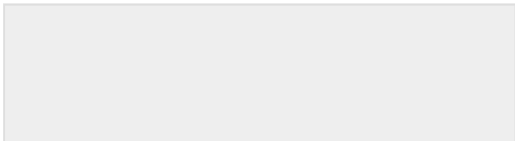
We have also been involved in Lassa fever research. Lassa fever is a viral hemorrhagic fever like Ebola, but less fatal. In the near future we hope to return to malaria vaccine development. We work closely with the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) on several projects. One of these projects is the annual avian influenza exercise. In collaboration with GAF, NMIMR and Ghana Health Service we conduct avian and swine sampling at six military reception stations in country. During the exercise we educate GAF personnel and their families about influenza.



We conducted avian and swine sampling at six military reception stations in country.

In addition to our formal role as a research organization we have had the opportunity to assist in disease outbreaks: a Lassa fever outbreak in Liberia and more recently the West African Ebola outbreak. As Officer in Charge of the NAMRU-3 Ghana Detachment, I was called by the chief medical officer of Operation Onward Liberty requesting educational materials to be provided to deployed troops to Liberia.

I also served on Ghana's Health Service Ebola National Technical Coordinating Committee (NTCC) as a case management subcommittee member. NAMRU-3 also led an interagency Ebola team comprised of members from CDC, USAID West Africa, USAID Ghana, and various other DoD agencies to coordinate WHO, Government of Ghana, local NGOs, foreign donors, UNMEER and USG aid agencies' preparedness efforts.



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I have also had the opportunity to interact with the local community by participating in a health fair and speaking with local students about the importance of a obtaining a good education.

Because Accra, Ghana is the region’s major international hub, an Ebola simulation exercise was conducted at Kotoka International Airport. NAMRU-3 Ghana provided expertise with a joint team from WHO, Ghana Health Services, and NMIMR to facilitate training of Ghana’s Ebola Rapid Response Teams.

I have also had the opportunity to interact with the local community by participating in a health fair and speaking with local students about the importance of a obtaining a good education. In Liberia, my first name, Nehkonti, means “there is a time for everything or everything has a time.” I am fortunate to be assigned to NAMRU-3 at this time and to be involved in work in West Africa that will make a positive impact. If you would like to know more about NAMRU-3 and the work we do please visit www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmrc/Pages/namru3.htm.

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